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ABSTRACT

On October 19 and 20, 1983, citizens' hearings were held by the Massachusetts Advocacy Center to receive testimony from students, parents, educators, economists, researchers, and advocates concerning a crisis in public education in the Commonwealth. Section I of this report presents an overview of the current debate concerning the reform of the public schools. Recommendations and findings of national reports advocating improvements in the schools are critiqued, and initiatives made in several states to implement change are briefly described. Subsequently, positions of advocates and citizens on 10 problematic issues facing educators in Massachusetts are delineated. These issues concern reversals of gains made by women, minorities, and others; basic skills; funding; discipline; the school-community relationship; expectations for student achievement; academic standards; education for employment; economically influenced family and student problems; and special programs for at-risk students. Section II presents an advocacy perspective on the past, present, and future of American education and education in Massachusetts. Section III lists 10 basic principles proposed for evaluating school reform in Massachusetts and suggests ways of applying these principles to other current proposals for school reform. Specifically addressed are several proposals contained in the December, 1983 report of the Massachusetts legislature's Joint Committee on Education. (RH)

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Our children at risk: the crisis in public education

A report on the hearings conducted by the Massachusetts Advocacy Center

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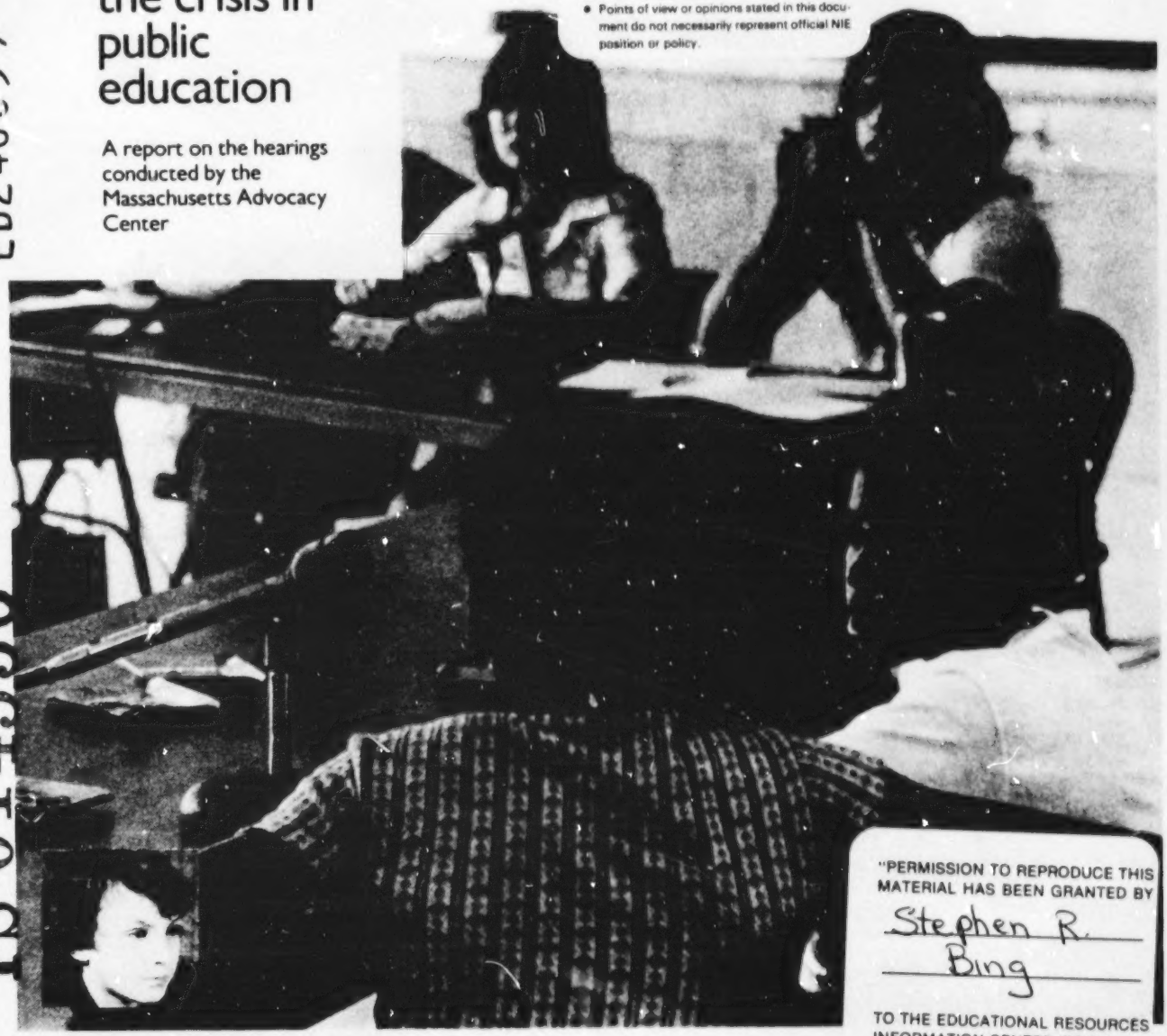

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This report and the activities it will engender are dedicated to the memory of Manny Carballo, former Secretary of the Executive Office of Human Services of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The son of immigrant parents seeking a better life in the United States, educated in the public schools of Newark, New Jersey, he turned that education and his considerable talents toward pursuit of the most compassionate and constructive version of the American dream—equality and justice for all.

Massachusetts Advocacy Center

The Massachusetts Advocacy Center, established in 1973 as an outgrowth of the Task Force on Children Out of School, Inc., represents children's interests before state and local bodies which legislate, regulate and deliver human services to children. The Center acts to strengthen progressive legislative mandates and to close the gap between those requirements and actual service delivery in the fields of education, juvenile justice and child health.

The Center uses a multi-strategic approach to problem solving. Administrative negotiation, regulation writing, case advocacy, public education, litigation are all employed when necessary. Moreover, participation on public task forces gives the Center input into executive branch rule making and policy proceedings.

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Our children at risk: the crisis in public education

A report on the hearings conducted by the Massachusetts Advocacy Center

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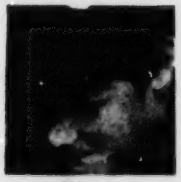

1984

Foreword

Massachusetts is at a critical juncture. Just six months ago, our public schools seemed to be dying from a lethal combination of active and passive neglect. Proposition 2½ produced numerous school closings, major reductions in teaching staffs, and the elimination of many special and innovative programs. Today, both the Governor and the Legislature are calling for sweeping reform of the state's educational system. Within the next six months, state policies will be set that will affect the shape of public education in the Commonwealth for at least the next decade.

It is crucial that we understand the choices we are making and the options that are before us. During the past two decades the efforts of parents and advocates resulted in the removal of the last legal barriers to universal entry to public schooling. At the same time, we realized that winning access is only the first step. The renewed attention to education provides us with the opportunity to fulfill the commitment to educate all our children to their full potential.

The task and responsibility now is to make things happen in the school buildings and local communities that lead to the development of broad knowledge, effective skills, and democratic values. Students, teachers, parents and administrators all have a role in creating a learning environment built on respect for students' differences and a recognition of students' and teachers' strengths and abilities. The school climate must be one of collaboration, inclusion and participation. Quality and equality must be measured by each other.

To achieve this vision of democratic education involves a deep understanding of the educational needs of all children who attend public school — especially those who have traditionally been unserved and underserved. It further requires a willingness to re-examine the institution and make basic changes in the policies, practices, and structures of public schools in order to meet those needs.

While most of those calling for educational reform today do so in the name of democratic education, their proposals do not reflect a full understanding of the problems and a complete commitment to change. Instead, most of the recent state and national proposals begin with the inaccurate assumption that access and equality have been achieved (sometimes at the expense of excellence) and assume that quality education can be achieved through strong doses of old-fashioned medicine that involves only minor changes in educational policy.

We want to warn the people of Massachusetts, the Governor, and the state Legislature that our children are at risk. If Massachusetts follows the national blueprint for educational reform, the changes instituted in the educational system will, at best, fail to address the real problems and will, at worst, exclude more children from the promises and benefits of education.

It is this concern that compelled us to initiate our own inquiry into the crisis in public education and issue this special report. On October 19 and 20, 1983 we held hearings at which a Citizen's Panel received testimony from students and parents as well as educators and economists. In addition, written testimony was encouraged from the general public. This paper presents the results of these hearings, adding some badly needed but too commonly unheeded voices to the current educational reform debate within the Commonwealth.

The Massachusetts hearings are the first of a series of national hearings sponsored by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students. Following a similar format, a Board of Inquiry (co-chaired by Harold Howe II and Marian Wright Edelman) will solicit testimony in a number of cities around the nation. A final report will be published by NCAS in the fall of 1984. In this process we aim to ensure that the perspective of those students who have regularly been excluded from the benefits of a meaningful education — and the growing numbers who stand in danger of exclusion in the future — will be given a central place in the national education debates.

We believe that these hearings and reports provide a badly needed reminder that the battles for justice in our schools are far from over. We urge you to join with us in a renewed campaign to ensure every child in America the best possible education.

Stephen R. Bing
Executive Director
Massachusetts Advocacy Center

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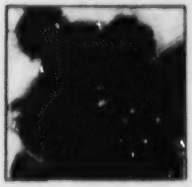

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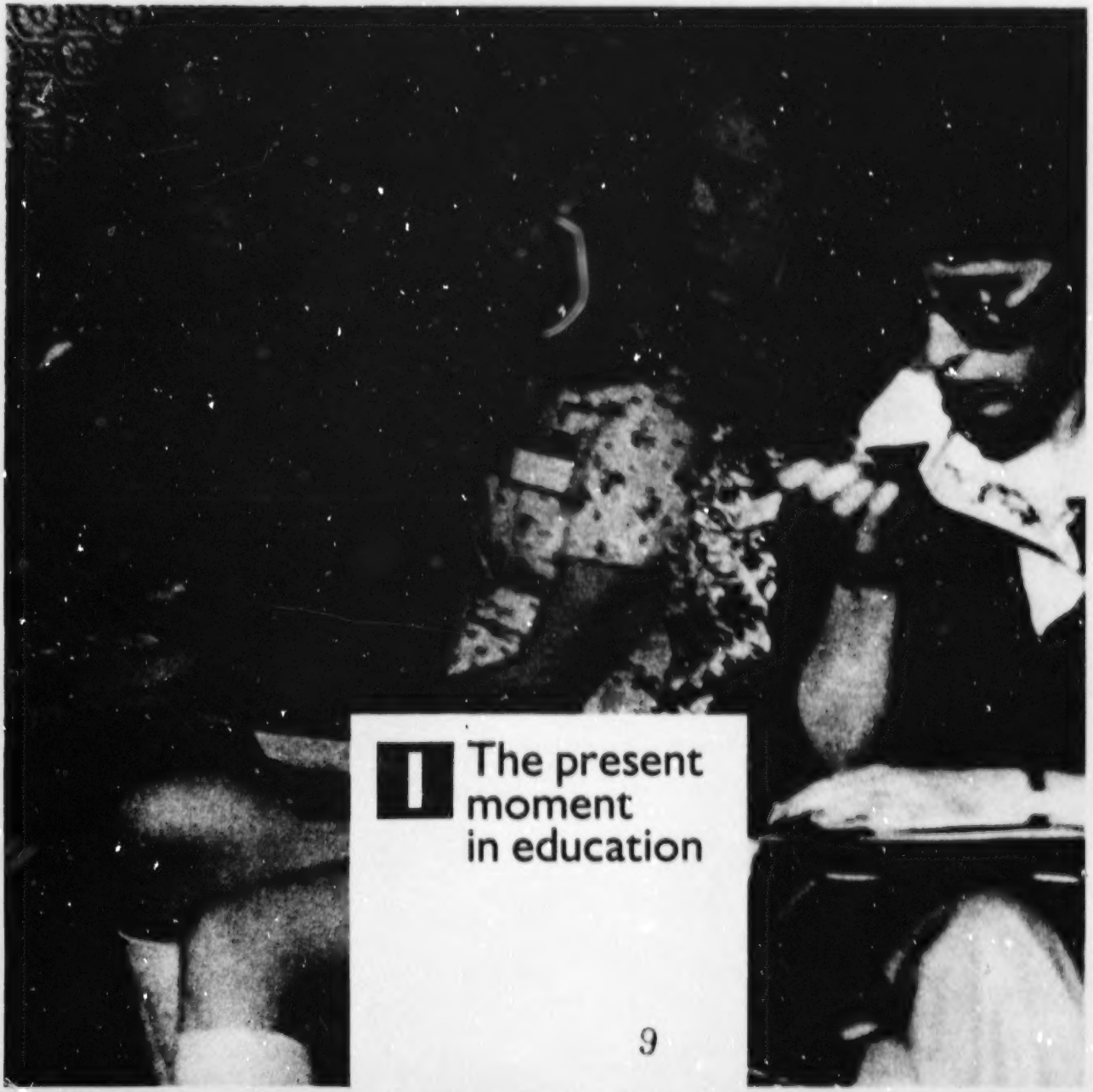


1 The present moment in education

I The present moment in education

The momentum for education reform has been building for the past year. The media reports on almost daily statements from the President and the Presidential candidates. National and state task forces and commissions continue to release studies and reports related to the crisis in our schools. The warnings of educational waste and decline resonate for people in Massachusetts and across the country. The crisis in public education is genuine, if at times sensationalized. Most people agree that the schools are, indeed, performing "far short of expectations." Yet the fundamental question remains as to **whose** expectations and **which** expectations—or, as one of the witnesses at the Massachusetts Advocacy Center hearings asked, "which children matter, and to whom?"

In response to this critical educational debate, national and state leaders are offering their analyses of the problems facing our schools, and their proposals for educational reform. While they do not speak in one voice, their criticisms and remedies are surprisingly similar (with a few notable exceptions) and not convincing. Fortunately, other voices, especially those of the people most directly involved in teaching and learning, have much to say in this important discussion.

In holding citizens' hearings into the crisis in public education, our intention was to provide a forum for the voices that were not likely to be heard in the rapidly escalating debate about education in the Commonwealth. We hoped to deepen our understanding, both of the problems in American education, and the possible starting points for addressing those problems.

A The voices that are being heard

At the national level

In his 1980 campaign for the Presidency Ronald Reagan promised to dismantle the Department of Education, make private education more accessible to the middle class through tax credits and tuition vouchers, and bring prayer back into the schools. Over the next two years, Reagan tried but failed to accomplish these stated goals. He nevertheless was successful in cutting back federal support for public education on several fronts.

Many of the national government's most important categorical programs for school aid were combined into block grants which then received large across-the-board cuts. The result was both a severe reduction in the monies available and a scramble for the remaining money which pitted various education constituencies against each other. In addition, a number of other federal programs to aid education, such as the provision of loan money for students entering higher education, were drastically reduced. The combined effect of these measures was a direct assault on universal public education.

In April, 1983, the political context changed. The publication of "A Nation at Risk," the report of Secretary of Education Terence Bell's National Commission on Excellence in Education proved to be the catalyst for a new impetus for educational reform. Describing American education as the victim of "a rising tide of mediocrity" equivalent to "an act of war" perpetrated against this nation by a hostile power, the report made educational reform an issue of national survival.

This tone of urgency was further reinforced by the publication of similar findings by several other major national task forces—most notably the Education Commission of the States, Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, chaired by James B. Hunt, and the Twentieth Century Fund, Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, chaired by Robert Wood.

This first wave of national reports brought education to center stage again by linking it to the key domestic issues facing the nation—jobs and economic growth. According to these reports, restoring America's competitive edge in the new global and technological economy depended on restoring excellence to the nation's schools. The language of restoration was important, both in evoking the image of an earlier time in American history when both the quality of life and the quality of schooling were higher, and in setting the stage for recommendations designed to recreate the mythological ideal school of the 1950s.

As a result of these reports, a new national educational agenda began to emerge, an agenda that falls far short of addressing the real problems in American education. Although the reports have different points of emphasis, those debating the details of the agenda assume that the major problems with American education come down to a broad relaxation of standards for students and teachers. They further assume that fairly simple, though stringent solutions will cure the major problems and restore excellence to the schools.

What they prescribe for the ailing state of American education is a good strong dose of the basics we have apparently neglected—more traditional academic curricula, more time in schools, more homework, more standardized tests, more academic requirements, with an added measure of computer literacy, and higher admissions standards. This same type of toughening up of expectations and standards is recommended for teachers as well through such programs as Master Teacher and merit pay, or even through the application of teacher competency tests.

Despite the subsequent release of numerous other national reports, and the escalating debate among Presidential hopefuls, this agenda has not changed very much since the summer. By the Fall of 1983, there were at least a dozen national reports as well as scores of state and local initiatives representing the views of state governors, the country's business leaders, college and university presidents, and even the educational policy research community.

Some of these were more measured in tone, some were more specific in their focus (limiting their recommendations, for example, to improvements in the teaching of math and science). Several—notably the works of John Goodlad and Theodore Sizer—represented much more comprehensive studies of schooling. With the exception of these latter studies, however, few challenged the basic assumptions or recommended solutions very different from those in the initial reports.

In fact, the national reports are strikingly similar both in what they do say and what they do not say. They are as Patricia Graham, Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, noted in her testimony before the Massachusetts Legislature's Joint Committee on Education, "long on why there is a problem and what the problem is, but short on how to solve it."

They assume that the decline in achievement is due to the breakdown of high standards and disciplined learning. They pay virtually no attention to the current practices of teaching and learning, which according to the Sizer study of high schools, are often stifling to creativity and to the development of higher order thinking skills. They do not speak clearly or directly to school policies and practices such as tracking or ability grouping which, according to John Goodlad, have the harmful effect of sorting and eventually retarding students' growth and development.

While they imply that schools were successful in the 1950s, the reports are frighteningly silent on the significant achievements and gains of the past two decades, when access to schooling was significantly expanded. They pay lip service to equity, but include little or no significant proposals directed at implementing an equity agenda. They do not reckon with the consequences of what they recommend—in terms of equity concerns in specific, and more generally in terms of how these "get tough" approaches will play themselves out in the complex day to day processes of teaching and learning. Finally they fail to adequately address the funding and governance issues which ultimately measure any commitment to reform.

At the state level

As almost all of the reports point out, the fundamental responsibility for education remains a matter for states and localities. Thus, the way in which states have begun implementing the various recommendations is more important than the recommendations themselves in understanding the new direction of educational reform. Soon after the initial task force reports were released, a number of states announced legislative and administrative initiatives.

- In Texas, the Superintendent of the Dallas schools called for tying teacher raises to student achievement measures.
- In California, the legislature voted for a longer school year and for a Mentor Teacher plan, only to find out that there were not enough funds to implement either.
- Florida instituted pupil and teacher competency testing, and came up with an unfunded merit pay plan.
- Illinois passed new high school graduation requirements and a Master Teacher plan for 500 teachers.
- In parts of North Carolina, 20 days have been added to the school calendar.

This list grows daily, as state commissions, task forces, and blue ribbon panels continue to meet in virtually every state.

Massachusetts is also in the process of formulating its own set of education reform proposals and initiatives. Responding to the urgent tone set by the initial national reports, the Legislature's Joint Committee on Education in cooperation with the Governor set out to reexamine the overall structure, financing, and objectives of public education.

The report of this committee, issued in December, 1983, was in fact much more modest than its original mandate. The report calls for state accreditation, based on planning documents prepared by each school district in cooperation with planning teams at the school level. In addition, the report calls for periodic testing of student performance, an expansion of early childhood education, and a revision of the local aid formula to reflect the special needs and resources of poorer communities better, and to equalize per-pupil expenditures statewide. Finally, there are sections on greater support for pre-service and in-service professional development, the replacement of tenure with a new system called FAIR employment rights, and a large capital outlay for computers and software.

Unlike many other states, the Massachusetts report puts as much emphasis on the carrot as on the stick. For students, there is a proposal for a Commonwealth Scholars program, to help finance the college education of high achievers; for teachers and schools there is the offer of innovation grants from a new public foundation for "promotion, evaluation, and replication of innovative programs and methods." The report does not propose merit pay for teachers, or minimum competency testing as a requirement of high school graduation for students.

Massachusetts, like a number of other states, is also being urged to move towards greater involvement of business in the setting of educational policy. In the Commonwealth's largest city, the Boston Compact specifically pledges the school system to meet certain basic requirements—improvement of student scores on basic skills tests, along with better attendance and an improvement in the dropout and college placement statistics—in return for the guarantee of a certain number of business placements for graduates of the city's high schools.

At the state level, many officials have been urging similar policies, reminding people of the important link between education and the state's economy, and insisting that Massachusetts become a model of matching education and training resources to industry needs. In efforts such as these, Massachusetts is picking up on the economic survival theme of the early reports. An improved education system is seen as a key factor in attracting or retaining important industries in the state, and thus in helping all citizens of the Commonwealth obtain a better quality of life. Unfortunately, such proposals also operate to narrow the purposes of education to those most closely tied to economic advancement.

All of these proposals—national and local—will be analyzed more fully later in this report. Before that can be done, however, another source of information must be pursued. While the national education reports, and their state level counterparts have seized the limelight, they do not represent the only voices for educational reform.

B The voices that are not being heard

Many of those most intimately connected with the day to day reality of schooling—teachers, parents, administrators, and students—have yet to be heard. In order to help remedy that problem, the Massachusetts Advocacy Center, in its hearings in October, 1983, turned primarily to just these neglected constituencies. We solicited testimony from people who would help us understand the daily realities and dilemmas of high schools in which close to half of those who begin ninth grade never graduate from twelfth; who had direct experience with bilingual and special education programs; who have been involved in research and school change efforts directed at serving a broader range and more diverse groups of students; who could help us understand the changing shape of the job market, and the changing relationships of school to work. The parents, students, advocates, teachers, administrators, and researchers who spoke provided us with an impassioned sense of concerns, problems, and missed opportunities in our schools.

I Previous access gains for minorities, women, economically disadvantaged, and physically and emotionally handicapped students are being undermined by lack of enforcement and by new federal, state, and local policies and proposals.

"In one vocational high school . . . blacks are suspended while whites are not for the same infraction, minorities are given tracks to lower paying skills than whites, and the yearbook contains racial slurs."
-lawyer for black students

"The psychological damage to Native American students caused by the denigration of their culture in school constitutes a new form of denied access."
-a Native American parent and advocate

Twenty years after the passage of the Federal Civil Rights Act, de facto discrimination based on race, sex, and handicaps exists in many Massachusetts schools. While neither the exclusion nor discrimination against any student is legally tolerated in Massachusetts, many school programs are so seriously underfunded—or unequally funded—as to exclude large numbers of students from equal educational opportunity. As one witness, who has studied education for many years noted, 'Chemistry in a poor and in a middle class high school in the same city is virtually a different science."

Such differences between the programs available to different students, and the growing disparity which recent budget cuts and regulatory changes have brought about, belies the promise of full access for all. Without substantial change, our hearings indicate that only greater inequality is on the horizon.

- The federal government's shift from targeted funding to block grants, combined with general budget cuts at the national level and Proposition 2½ in Massachusetts, has placed bilingual, special needs and compensatory programs in direct competition with each other and with the needs of the regular student population;
- Limited English speaking children have four times greater chance of graduating from high school if they are in bilingual programs, yet bilingual programs are constantly threatened with cutbacks;
- In school districts in Massachusetts, administrators are pushing students out of bilingual classes into regular classes before students are ready, so as not to have to hire additional bilingual teachers. Not surprisingly, many of these students quickly fall behind and become discouraged with school work;
- It is no longer necessary to have formal bilingual teacher certification to be certified for bilingual programs in Massachusetts. Hundreds of untrained teachers have been grandfathered into positions as "English as a Second Language" teachers to work with bilingual programs.

Many of the educational gains of the civil rights era are under assault. The growing tendency to see equity and excellence as competing goals further threatens the quality of education available to many children in our schools.

2 Basic skills are being defined too narrowly; many of the qualities most needed are ignored in the rush "back to basics."

"They're killing our kids with basics!"
-a parent

"Good education must be integrated education. Children have to function in a multi-cultural world. Living as a human being is a basic skill."
-school desegregation officer

"Schooling can either mold students passively to accept their society and their place in it, or prepare them actively to change it."
-teachers union representative

Witnesses at the hearings, while supporting the need for strong academic offerings, unanimously rejected the excessive focus on skills for the world of high technology found in some of the education reports. They offered instead a definition of basic skills which included:

- the skills to work for their own personal development and their community's development—skills which our witnesses made clear included the ability to read, write and calculate, but also the ability to think and solve problems creatively;
- the psychological and physiological wholeness to enable students to feel good about themselves and confident as they face the present and the future;
- the cultural skills to function as creative citizens, able to appreciate the valuable contributions of differing cultures to our common heritage.

These basics have yet to become the focus of educational reform, in Massachusetts or elsewhere. In order to shift the focus of educational reform to this sort of understanding of basic education, there needs to be a major transformation of the educational debate. Massachusetts is a good place to begin.

3 Education in Massachusetts is underfunded and unequally funded.

"Equalization must mean leveling all students up to the best that is now available."

-a parent

"It seems clear that one sum of money, all else being equal, cannot be expected to yield an equitable educational experience to another sum of dollars over three times greater."

-a teacher union representative

Many factors influence access to quality education for all the students of the Commonwealth. And money is one significant factor. Since at least 1977, Massachusetts has had the greatest inequalities among school district of any state in the nation. Per pupil spending spreads from Rowe at $5013 to Athol at $1637, with the result that some school districts have more than three times as much money spent on their education as others. In addition, some urban school districts have a disproportionate number of bilingual and special needs students who need additional resources in order to receive equal access to educational quality; increasingly, these resources are more difficult to secure.

Since Proposition 2½, even the "wealthy" districts in Massachusetts are living with very limited resources for their schools. As one witness pointed out, "Equalization of school finance cannot mean leveling down. New sources of revenue must be generated to expand the total amount of wealth going to support public education in the state."

4 Discipline is often handled in a punitive, exclusionary, and arbitrary fashion, rather than seen within the context of creating a positive school climate.

"We want an end to exclusion by expulsion; our children have a right to stay in school buildings."

-a parent

The Project to Monitor the Code of Discipline in Boston has identified numerous examples of unequal enforcement of the code, based on student's race. Speakers from other districts around the state observed the same phenomenon.

In far too many cases, the disciplinary action has involved suspension or expulsion—creating yet one more means of denying access to school for some of the students who most need a positive school experience. In Boston, black students are suspended more than twice as often as white students, and most are suspended on a vague charge of "disruption" which includes verbal offenses. On Cape Cod, Native American students experience similar discriminatory exclusion.

According to one legal advocate, those who see the need for tougher discipline in school as a means of improving education have their priorities reversed: "inadequate education causes discipline problems—not the other way around." Other witnesses supported this view, noting that numerous suspensions are for alcohol and drug-related problems, but few schools offer meaningful alcohol and drug counseling programs. At the same time, suspended and expelled students end up in a nonsupervised, noneducational atmosphere outside of school, increasing the risk of their becoming involved with crime and the criminal justice system.

With so much of the attention today being directed at the problems of enforcing discipline, far too little of the current discussion of school climate involves the other more positive factors which help create a healthy educational atmosphere. A witness cited research on bilingual programs indicating that few students in these programs are suspended or expelled. Yet these programs, which have been so successful at building student enthusiasm for their work and thus improving both discipline and academic achivement, are being undercut instead of expanded.

Advocates' insistence on due process and First Amendment rights for students have led to a better understanding of effective school discipline in a democratic society. Yet some of the current "get tough" rhetoric seems to view an insistence on students' rights as being "soft." Schools should be judged on the way they create an atmosphere which shows respect for students as active learners and as future citizens of a democratic society.

5 There are few, if any, ways for parents, teachers, administrators, and students to work together in making school policy or in planning educational goals and programs.

"Parent and citizen involvement in school policy and planning is a way to improve students' education, and the right way to do business in a democratic society."

-an educational researcher

"Administrators, teachers, and parents need to be able to come together to plan, not just after the fact when the real planning is over."

-a parent

In much of the current discussion of educational reform, students, parents, and teachers are too often seen as problems to be solved, not as the primary resources for quality education. There is a clear implication that some distant educational authorities know best what is needed in American education, and that they must pass their information on to teachers who, in turn, will pour it into students.

The collaboration and teamwork among all of those directly concerned with education is too often absent in educational debate or practice. As one witness, a teacher's union president, put it, "Parents should be involved in discussing the goals of education: what are we preparing their children for, and what should that education be like. Parents have been shut out of the school for too long."

There is little in the way schools currently operate, either in the context of the curriculum or in the administrative structures for decision making, which would mark them as institutions committed to full inclusion or to true democratic practice. For example:

- Teachers are not allowed time for cooperative planning among themselves or with parents, administrators or students;
- Except in the case of special needs students, there is no formally defined and strongly supported role for parents in the planning of their children's educational experience;
- Student government is nearly always limited to the most marginal and superficial aspects of school life.

This reality is especially unfortunate in the face of such clear evidence that there are alternatives which work. The successful cooperation of parents and teachers in the design of programs for special needs children is perhaps the outstanding example of the added resources which can be brought to a child's education when parents are actively involved.

6 Low expectations are communicated to students and teachers through the imposition of tracking, norm-referenced testing, and other sorting practices, as well as through the allocation of inadequate financial resources for education.

"The teachers stop caring because of the system, but you can't blame students for not being enthusiastic if the teachers and headmasters aren't enthusiastic."
-a high school student

"There is a genius in every one of us; but if we tell our kids they are dummies, by middle school they will feel dumb, and angry."
-a parent

Raising expectations rests on the belief that all students are capable of learning if they are given the support, encouragement, and necessary remedial help to do so. One witness who has spent years studying the effects of expectations on students reminded the panel, "The research shows that expectancy as a belief or prediction of children's success or failure has a real effect on how well they do . . . The recent rhetoric about education totally misunderstands and misuses 'standards.' High expectations are confused with high standards, which children are dared to jump over. This is not the way to raise pupil achievement."

The commitment to ensuring the success of all students has been sadly lacking. For example:

- A number of classrooms in the Commonwealth still do not have sufficient books, or even desks, to serve the students assigned;
- Few, if any, teacher training programs give teachers adequate preparation for dealing with classes of students representing different cultures, resulting in serious—if unintentional—discrimination by teachers unfamiliar with the cultural patterns of their students;
- In various systems of differential tracking, minority students and girls are encouraged to enter programs which give vocational training for low-skill, low-pay jobs, while white males are encouraged to prepare for the skilled trades;
- In cities and towns throughout Massachusetts, a disproportionate percentage of the Proposition 2½ cuts fell on schools.

Parents, teachers, and students are getting the message that they do not count. This message must be changed before any discussion of higher standards will make any sense.

7 Raising standards without providing remedial and other supports necessary for guaranteeing that all students will meet the standards is a means of assuring failure for increasing numbers of students.

"Basic skills examinations as a requirement for graduation are all right only if they are phased in over time and students are given full remedial help if they have any trouble along the way so that tests do not become a means of exclusion later in a student's program."
-a high school student

Today in Massachusetts many students are experiencing failure in school. When high schools do not serve the needs of many youth, when they do not develop programs which seem relevant or basically interesting, when the school setting becomes both boring and oppressive, a few will act out, get into trouble and be expelled. But many more will simply stop coming; they will drop out formally or informally.

The high school drop-out rate for Massachusetts, statewide, is over 20%; in Boston, the drop-out rate is 47%. Approximately 9300 students in Boston are absent every school day and many of these are absent so often as to make them virtually nonparticipants in the educational process.

To scapegoat individual students or teachers under such circumstances is clearly a classic example of victim blaming. Something much larger than any one child or teacher is obviously going on. One of the witnesses, a former district superintendent, underscored this point, in recounting the story of his district in which 84.6% of the children were behind grade level in reading and junior high school graduates were an average of three years behind grade level in reading:

"There are those who call statistics like this a sign of failure; but if 85% of the products of any industry shared a basic characteristic, we would assume that it was the intention of that industry to mark its products with that characteristic. Thus, I concluded that the 15% of our children who graduated from our schools able to read at their grade level were deviate. The system was 85% successful. Illiteracy was its product."

In the current climate of educational reform in Massachusetts, it happens far too often that "'high expectations are confused with high standards, which children are dared to jump over."

Without any real attention to the remedial programs or resources that will be required to help students meet new standards the following proposals have been made:

- The state's largest circulation newspaper has called for a rigorous state-mandated course of study;
- School committees in Massachusetts have already begun to adopt new standards for promotion and graduation, based on students' test scores;
- The Board of Regents of Higher Education for Massachusetts has recently adopted new, higher standards for admission to the state's colleges and universities.

Something is radically wrong with these "solutions." New standards, adopted without carefully designed remedial programs already in place, assure failure for many. To assure the kind of success every student deserves, there needs to be a review of the fundamental issues affecting the very structure and style of teaching and learning in Massachusetts's public schools.

8 Narrowly gearing education to the job market will not result in better job opportunities for most students; despite the growth of high technology in Massachusetts, the majority of new jobs will be in low-skilled, low-paid service and technical occupations.

"A person who will be able to participate in the affairs of government and neighborhood must be able to think critically. And this applies to the children of the poor as well as children of the rich."

-a mayoral candidate

In the United States and in Massachusetts, many reformers still assume that if only Americans were better educated, the economy would be on the upswing again; and conversely, if American students were willing to study hard, master difficult subjects, and become successful learners, then rewards in jobs are out there waiting for them. The economists at our hearings offered quite a different picture:

- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the American economy will generate 19 million new jobs between 1980 and 1990, about 3.5 million of which will be "professional and technical." Low-wage service and clerical work will account for almost 7 million new jobs;
- Job opportunities in the United States are polarizing, there is an increasing concentration of jobs at the extremes of the earning scales, and the lower extreme is by far the larger—middle class jobs are disappearing. Thus the logic of gearing schooling to the job market as it currently exists will be to depress the level of education for most students;
- Of the 20 fastest growing job categories, only four require more than a high school diploma and two require any college experience;
- While high tech industries are creating a few new jobs for highly skilled and highly paid managers and engineers, the vast majority of high tech jobs are in low-skilled and low-paid areas.

The sad reality is that most of the jobs that are likely to be available for students will not require more skills than the schools presently offer. Claiming that unemployment and underemployment are results of poor schooling is only a new and insidious form of victim blaming in a society which is not equipped to absorb large numbers of skilled workers.

In the long run, our witnesses called for **both** a broader set of purposes for schooling than simply job training and the kind of economic transformation which will lead to the utilization of the skills every student can acquire.

9 The decline in real family income, combined with the decreasing services available to families-at-risk, means that an increasing number of children carry into school an extra burden of physical and psychological stress.

"I submit to you that the purpose of the attack on public education is to strip the American people of their expectations for their society."

-a parent

"Reaganism is not budget cuts but budget transfers, from education/human services to the military. For quality education we need the money back."

-education advocate

Many of the reforms of the 1960s, for example the attempts of the war on poverty to raise family incomes and the provision of additonal services such as school breakfast and school health programs, were based on the clear recognition that children who are hungry, sick, or worried about their family cannot possibly do as well in school as students who are free from these cares. Yet today these reforms are under attack on two sides.

First, the American economy has been in a state of decline for several years. Not only have unprecedented numbers of Americans been unemployed over the past few years, but many of those who have kept their jobs or who have gone back to work are now earning wages which are considerably lower—in real dollars—than their past income.

At the same time, both the national government and the state government in Massachusetts have, during the past several years, been engaged in significant cuts in the social services available to families and to the schools which serve the children of poor families. The added burden of physical and psychological stress on students should not be underestimated:

- The proportion of children living below the poverty level has increased by 52% in ten years in Massachusetts. The 1980 census shows 202,474 Massachusetts children under 18 in this category;
- In July 1982, 29% fewer Massachusetts persons were able to participate in the food stamp program than in 1978;
- Because of changes in federal policy, 32% fewer school lunches were served to Massachusetts children in 1981 than in 1980;
- Participation in school breakfasts by Massachusetts children declined by 37% from 1980 to 1981, and the special milk program has been discontinued in public schools.

In the face of such statistics, to talk of a rising tide of mediocrity in our schools, and then blame it largely on a lack of discipline or rigor is irresponsible if not immoral.

10 Programs developed for at-risk students, especially bilingual and special needs students, have produced significant new ways of providing quality education for all students, but these models are being ignored.

"I suggest that we take a look at some of the provisions of the special education programs to see if they may contain some elements that could be applied to so-called 'regular' education. Two unique characteristics of Chapter 766 and P.L. 94-142 are: first, the provision of educational programs that are individually tailored to meet the needs of particular children, and second, a requirement for genuine participation of the parents of the children to be served."

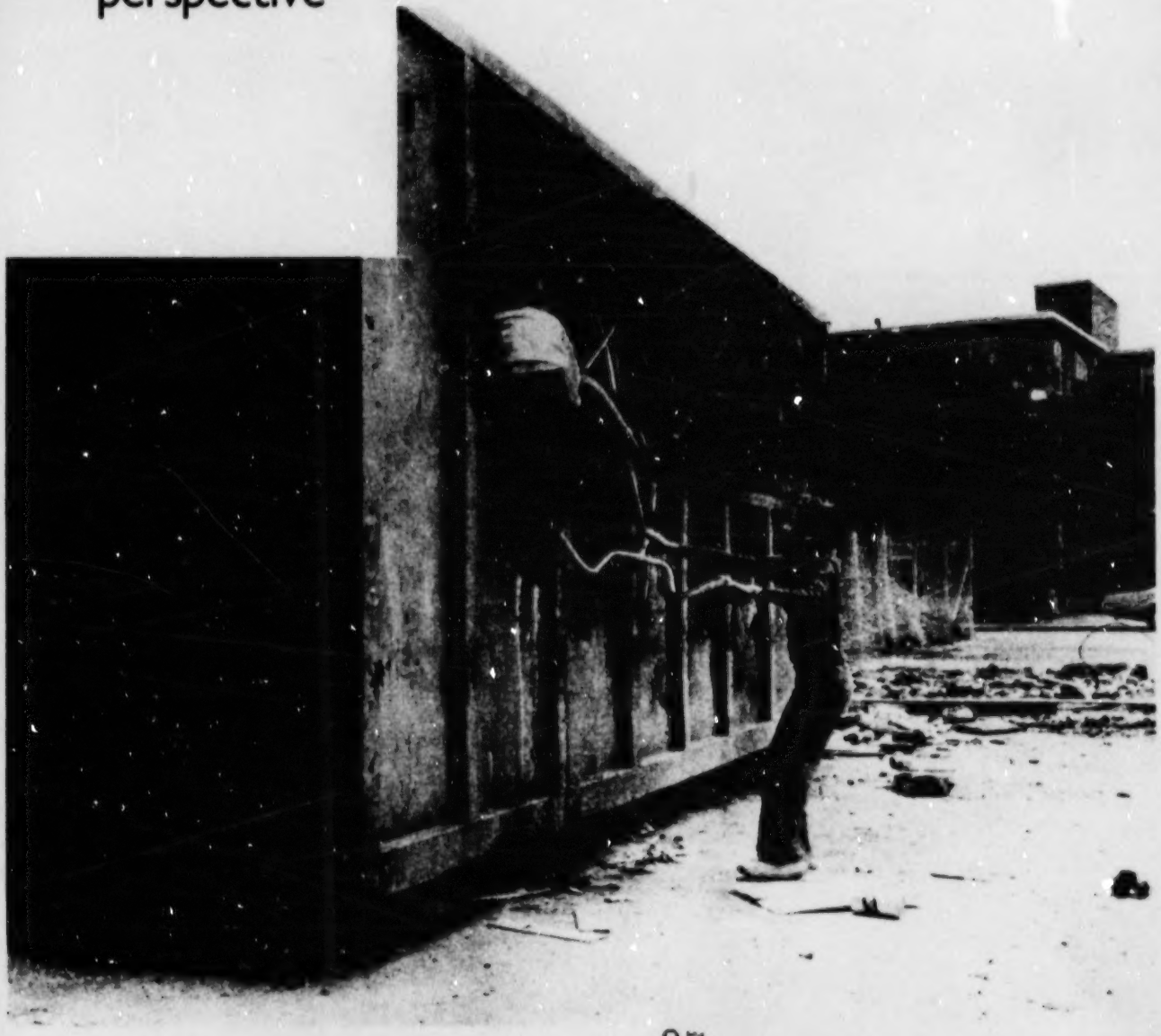
-education advocate

At a time when much of the education rhetoric seems to pit the needs of excellence against the needs of equity, some of the most important new discoveries of ways to improve the quality of education for all students are being overlooked. For example:

- Bilingual programs which have led the way to an improved means of educating children in a multicultural setting
- Special education which has shown the value of parent involvement and parent-teacher cooperation in the development of individualized instructional plans, as well as more general ways to do remedial programming and to develop cooperation between schools and human service providers;
- Effective schools research which has shown the importance of school based leadership, as well as the opportunities for parent, student, and teacher involvement in school planning;
- Alternative programs which have given new examples of ways to structure schools, ways to motivate students, and ways to develop a healthy school climate.

Unfortunately, few if any of these discoveries are being used in plans for educational reform in Massachusetts or nationally. This is a serious loss, for these are tested programs with proven results. Some like the Massachusetts special education legislation served as a national model in the 1970s. Yet programs which have been designed for at-risk constituencies continue to be seen as problems to be overcome rather than opportunities to be grasped. The loss is everyone's.

II Towards an advocacy perspective



II Towards an advocacy perspective

Clearly, the Massachusetts hearings presented a picture of the day-to-day realities of schooling for poor and working-class students. It is a picture that is all too familiar to students, parents, teachers, and advocacy groups across the country. Increasing numbers of children are coming to school from families who are under severe economic stress, who are living in poverty or are part of the growing category of "the working poor." As federal and state assistance programs are cut, an increasing percentage of these children arrive at school hungry, underfed, and neglected. They take buses on which there are no monitors. They then enter schools that are underfunded, in some cases in need of basic physical repair, in many cases understaffed.

Inside the school building they are confronted with school policies and practices that sort and classify them for bottom-level roles in a stratified adult world. They are victims of low expectations and discriminatory or arbitrary discipline; they are expected to learn "the basics" through rote repetition and drill. They drop out or graduate from high school to become part of high unemployment statistics, or find marginal employment that leaves them at or near the poverty level. Deprived of essential needs and robbed of their futures, they are victims of what the Carnegie Council on Children has labeled the "stacked deck."[1]

The solution to all of this, we are being told, is simple. The schools should "get tough." Students should spend more time in school, controlled by tighter discipline, meeting more requirements, and getting down to basics. But this solution sounds very much like the problem. It represents little more than a tightening up of our current model of education. The parent who said, "They are killing our kids with basics" was referring to the programmed scripts based on behavior modification techniques, the reading "kits" consisting of hundreds of unrelated paragraphs followed by multiple choice questions, and the reams of ditto sheets that are already used in many of our schools.[2] More basic skills tests, and more time in school will not add to the educational value of this type of curriculum or pedagogy.

Those who propose a get tough approach to the problems of the schools tend to look back to a golden past (just before the "permissive wave" of the 1960s)—when well-behaved students learned the 3Rs from dedicated teachers. But this vision of the past has little meaning for those who were excluded from the "good old days" in the schools, by virtue of their race, social class, sex, or disabilities. More important, it fails to draw on the resources which were developed in the 1960s and 1970s out of the struggles for educational equity—resources which could be used to significantly reshape the kind of education available for all students in the 1980s.

At the same time, the proponents of toughness tend to look towards a golden future—when high technology will provide interesting, well paying jobs for all properly educated citizens.

Unfortunately, the high technology future holds little promise for those likely to find themselves working in the low-skilled, low paying service sector jobs which many economists predict will be the major jobs resulting from the technological revolution. This heavy emphasis on the needs of high technology also tends to turn the curriculum away from other skills which students will need if they are to make their way through the difficult waters of the late twentieth century American job market—skills in self-motivation and creative thinking, skills in understanding and changing political and social priorities, skills in creating an economy that can, indeed, provide a meaningful and respectable job for everyone.

A The good old days: a closer look at the past

Since the publication of "A Nation at Risk," the assumption of a rising tide of mediocrity in the schools has become virtually universal within educational debates. As the Chairman of the Bank of Boston commented in announcing an unprecedented endowment of $1.5 million to the city schools: "During the past several decades our schools have gotten off the track."[3]

The National Commission on Excellence shares the same sentiment, seeing the task as essentially restorative, a return to "what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished. . . ." The President offers an even simpler solution—bring prayer back into the schools and get those causing trouble back out of the schools.

This focus on decline presumes both an earlier time in American education when schools worked well for the masses of children and a more recent period when a tide of mediocrity swept in and obliterated quality education. While the "good old days" are seldom described concretely, the image is most often a reference to the 1950s, particularly the post-Sputnik era. Allegedly, this was a time when science and math were a priority over other "softer subjects," and when, more generally, schools provided American children with solid basic skills and the knowledge and work habits necessary for success in the larger society.

A closer look at that period reveals a very different picture. The educational reforms of the Sputnik and post-Sputnik eras might have resulted in greater resources and higher standards for some students, but access to quality education was far from universal.

Many youths attended schools that lacked even the most basic resources; equal access to secondary schooling was still far from universal. A number of youth were excluded by economic exigencies, language and cultural barriers, racial hostility, and geographic isolation. Even greater numbers of students were allowed entry into the schools, only to be denied access to suitable or desired programs and services.

In the 1950s, many black children were still attending underfunded, largely segregated schools. And many children of all races and ethnic groups were segregated within schools through the mechanism of tracking. Using such presumably objective measures as IQ tests and grades, the schools tended to place disproportionate numbers of poor children in the "general track," where expectations and standards were low.

Further, in at least some urban areas, as many as half of the students dropped out of school in grades 9-11. Thus, whatever, the high schools did provide for the students in the heyday of the 1950s, there were many of the same age bracket who did not receive such benefits.[4]

With the emergence of the Civil Rights movement in the late 1950s, the schools became a significant arena for the struggle toward a more inclusive and democratic society. In that period, thousands of people joined local, statewide, and national movements for greater educational opportunity—to knock down the barriers of racially and economically segregated schools, as well as to open schools up to those who were previously excluded—minorities, poor, women and handicapped. The reforms instituted during that period were aimed both at making the schools accessible to new populations and ensuring that the system served everyone.

The emphasis on mediocrity and decline in the current criticisms of public education is at least in part an attack on the educational reforms attempted and the victories won during these struggles for inclusion. The last 20 years of efforts by advocates, students, teachers and parents are thus characterized as somehow diluting the excellence achieved in the 1950s.

This cannot be allowed to stand as the legacy of the educational reforms of the Civil Rights era. This was the first period during which the masses of American children could expect to complete the full 12 years of schooling. The one overwhelming achievement of this period was the gain in enrollment rates. In 1960, only 60% of people aged 25 to 29 had completed four years of high school, and only 11% had completed four years of college. By 1978, 85% of that age group had completed high school, and 23% had completed college.[5]

As one of the witnesses at the MAC Hearings stated, "In November, 1975, when the Education of All Handicapped Children Act was enacted into law, we had finally reached the ultimate objective for public education in a democracy-zero reject. . . Now that the schools may no longer use exclusion as a substitute for adaptation, thinking and caring citizens have a responsibility to develop new approaches. . ."

Attacking the attempted reforms and changes of this period is tantamount to removing the only guideposts we have in the quest to develop such approaches.

From the considerable body of research and information available on the educational reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, very little has found its way into the current debate. Direct references to that period are usually limited to criticisms of a "watered down" curriculum and the substitution of "frills" for basics.

Declining test scores are pointed to as the result of diminished quality. The National Commission On Excellence in Education, for example, used the poor performance of U.S. students on standardized tests compared to students from other industrialized nations as a prime indicator of the rise of mediocrity in our schools. What they failed to take into account or deliberately ignored, is that European secondary schools are still very much elite institutions; thus the test population has been narrowed down to those most likely to do well on tests, artificially raising the average score. When the top 10% of the age group in the U.S. are compared to their European counterparts, they score as well as or higher than the European group.

The misinterpretation of test scores in this way masks the real educational achievements of the past 20 years. As an assistant superintendent who spoke at the MAC Hearings pointed out: "The national reports have misread U.S. educational achievement. In terms of numbers in school and attainment, the U.S. is doing well—78% of eligible youth are in high school, and more children are able to read than ever before." According to the National Association of Educational Progress, throughout the 1970s, elementary school students have shown steady improvement in their reading, writing, and math scores. These gains have been primarily concentrated among poor and minority students and those who were weakest academically.[6]

Furthermore, tests measure only one very small part of the total educational experience. To analyze and evaluate two decades of educational progress through test data only is to greatly limit what can be learned from the successes and failures of that period. The changes that occurred in the public schools since the 1960s are far too complicated to be explained by any single measure or set of statistics. This period was characterized by active struggles for inclusion and equity outside the schools and by constant attempts to develop programs and policies that would serve the new, diverse population inside the schools.

Before the cutbacks and retrenchment of the 1980s, victories won by parents and advocates in the legal and legislative arenas, combined with innovative programs initiated by parents, teachers, and students within the schools, had placed Massachusetts in the forefront of democratic educational reform.

- In 1965, the Legislature passed the Racial Imbalance Act. Although the definition of Racial Imbalance (a school with a population over 50% nonwhite), exempted suburban and other all-white schools, the Act did achieve a shift in government's role from strict neutrality on racial issues to an insistence on affirmative action by public school authorities in order to eliminate racial imbalance, whatever the cause. The Act helped lead to the desegretation of schools in several cities and towns, and formed part of the base for the Federal District Court's decision desegregating Boston Public Schools.
- In 1971, special education legislation was passed, establishing the principle that children are underserved, not deficient, and that the school system is responsible for the education of all children. The legislation required individualized planning for special needs' students and strong parent involvement through a core assessment process. The Massachusetts law, Chapter 766, became the model for the federal special education legislation (PL 94-142).
- Also in the 1970s, the state mandated and committed substantial state funds to transitional bilingual education programs. These programs were based on the theory that students who learn in their native language first become better readers in their second language. It also began to address the difficult dilemma of giving a growing number of recently immigrant students access to the formal culture, without requiring them to renounce their own culture.
- Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, innovative programs proliferated in the Commonwealth. At the elementary level, parents lobbied school committees for schools and classrooms in which their children could experience the pedagogy of open education. At the middle and high school level, staff and students developed an array of alternative programs. Many of these were directed at students not achieving in the regular program. Others sought to develop more creative and democratic learning environments for diverse populations of students.

As a result of such reforms, new populations were brought into the system and important ground was gained in raising expectations that schools should fully serve the disadvantaged and the underachieving. For many of the people who spoke at the MAC hearings, such reforms serve as a basic reference point—both in terms of what was accomplished and what remains to be accomplished.

One of the reasons this era in education has become such a target of attack is that the reforms of the period left no one satisfied. Some felt things had gone "too far" and wanted a return to the good old days, before the schools were called upon to serve such diverse populations. These are the voices whose views are resurfacing in most of the current debates.

Others felt the reforms had not gone far enough, or had not been thoroughly implented. These are the voices we heard at our hearings. In such testimony, many people gave example after example of how initial access gains had been undermined by lack of enforcement or resources, of how schools remain stratified and unequally funded, and of how children are left unserved and underserved.

An administrator of bilingual education, for example, cited research indicating that there was reduced absenteeism, and increased retention rate for Hispanic students in the programs. Yet, he pointed out, of the 3.6 million students in the United States whose first language in not English, no more than 330,000 are in bilingual programs. For the vast majority, these programs have never been available—even before recent budget cuts.

Other witnesses were even more graphic in their descriptions of the grim realities of urban schools. A study of schools in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Washington and Detroit led one researcher to conclude that "schools are making a positive effort not to educate black children."

The assessment of a Springfield, Massachusetts vocational school Principal, quoted by one witness, is perhaps the best summary of what many people feel about the democratic reforms of the past two decades: "All these initial energies have been spent cracking the wall. The same amount of energy applied now will produce even greater results. If we stop now, the effect will be to seal up that initial crack and thus waste all of the initial effort."

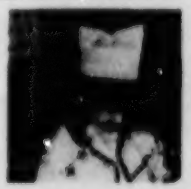
How and where to apply the continuing energy is of course a complex issue. Based on their own efforts at school-based innovation, several witnesses were able to offer some starting points. One assistant principal pointed out the need to institute changes slowly, to move towards higher requirements and higher standards only when there is a simultaneous commitment to develop curriculum that is responsive to every kind of learning and learning style, and to provide quality teacher training and support.

Another Assistant Superintendent offered the concrete example of a pilot program in two-way bilingual education, in which Hispanic and native English-speaking students in grades 4 through 6 are learning each other's languages and working together on computer literacy. A Desegregation Officer who spoke supported the need for local/state/federal partnerships to fund such new approaches to multi-culturalism.

The people who testified were quite unanimous and quite clear in their belief that quality and equality are inseparable goals that should never be posed in contradiction to one another. Examples were offered of desegregation plans that brought new energy to curriculum and staff development, greater community involvement and an improvement in the overall educational quality of the schools. It was suggested that programs such as those initiated within special education and bilingual education funding may contain some elements that could be applied to so-called "regular education." In particular, two unique characteristics of Chapter 766 were noted: 1) the mandates that programs be individually tailored to meet the needs of particular children and 2) the requirement for genuine participation of parents of the children to be served.

These mandates are progressive pedagogically and offer a possible model of parent involvement and parent-teacher cooperation in assessing the needs and planning the curriculum for all children, not just those in special education. The success of bilingual programs in respecting children's native cultures, while introducing them to the formal culture, should also be looked at for its possibilities in enhancing our understanding of how to create a positive, multi-cultural climate for all students.

Ideas such as these are promising. The descriptions of grass-roots school reform efforts provided by the witnesses underscore the importance of building on the knowledge which has been gained through years of efforts and experiments. We now have a much better understanding of what is needed to create schools which serve the needs of all of their students. The legacy of the last two decades is not one of declining quality and rising mediocrity but rather an unfinished agenda and the need for continued commitment in providing every child with the best possible education.



B The golden age of high technology: two differing views of the future

While one basic assumption behind much of the current language of educational reform reflects a misperceived image of a "golden past," a second assumption is based on an equally unfounded image of a "golden future." This vision rests on the notion that the growth of high technology will present expanding economic opportunities for vast numbers of American workers.

In light of this view, the major educational problem is seen as the schools' failure to produce a highly skilled labor force for this technological economy. Thus, "A Nation at Risk" warned that "Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world."

This frightening perception has been repeated many times in the past year. Testifying before the Legislature's Committee on Education in Massachusetts, the Secretary of Economic Affairs warned of the need to maintain our "competitive edge."

At the same time, at a recent university forum on school-business linkages, one of the leading spokespersons for the business community applied the same logic to employment problems. Indicating that unemployment is a function of poorly motivated and poorly educated youth, he concluded that "only the unemployed can solve unemployment."

Through statements such as the above, critics of public education are trying to build the argument that the "toughening up" they propose is essential to economic survival—of individuals and of the society as a whole. They maintain that we cannot, individually and collectively, afford mediocrity, and promise better days to come if the educational and economic systems cooperate fully in the move towards a more highly technological society. Thus, simultaneously, the schools are being blamed for where we are and held up as our best hope for the future.

When the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its report six months ago, unemployment was at the highest levels since the Depression, and economic recession was in full swing. With the quality of life declining for many Americans, the schools provided both an accessible and convenient target for people's frustrations, anger and fears. As a student of education history who spoke at the MAC hearing pointed out: "Criticisms of the U.S. education system tend to correlate with economic crisis."

The attempt to blame the schools for our nation's economic crisis makes no more sense today than it did during the Depression. The crisis in the U.S. economy is not primarily the result of skill shortages caused by an undereducated and, therefore, unproductive worktorce.

The notion that education is the key to economic growth was central to many of the War on Poverty programs of the 1960s. As Bennett Harrison pointed out in his testimony before the Massachusetts Legislature's Joint Committee on Education, the research and program experience from those years proved otherwise: employability is not the same as employment; education and training do not create jobs. Having studied the research of this period carefully, the Vice President's Task Force on Youth Employment concluded in 1978 that "Despite a popular conviction that a lack of basic education skills causes youth unemployment, there is virtually no evidence to support this contention."[8]

There is considerable evidence that skill shortages are not the cause of declining productivity in existing jobs. For the past 20 years, the demands for highly educated labor in the U.S. economy have not kept pace with the rising education level of American workers. The American workforce, in other words, has already attained an educational level that exceeds the skill requirements for many jobs in the economy. Ironically, raising the level of educational attainment, when there is already a gap between the educational level of workers and the skill requirements of jobs, can actually undermine productivity. For example, studies have demonstrated that workers with underutilized skills are less satisfied, less stable, less productive, and more frequently absent from work.[9]

Focusing on the skill levels of workers and the education that they are or are not receiving diverts attention from other factors that are more central to the cause of economic decline. It is important, for example, to examine where U.S. capital is going and where it is not going. One does not have to be an economist to note that U.S. capital invested in multi-national corporations outside the country and substantial outlays to the military within the U.S. do not contribute largely to greater economic activity, job creation, or increased mobility for U.S. workers.

A Jobs with Peace spokesperson testified at our hearings about just how few jobs are created by military spending: if $100 million is put towards building missiles, 10,000 are created. If the same $100 million were directed at education, 62,000 jobs would ensue. Furthermore, the kinds of jobs created by military spending tend to be highly technical jobs or very low-level and low-skilled.

The belief that gearing the schools to the demands of high technology will create a technological economy with greater and better work opportunities is widespread and erroneous. A labor economist and organizer who gave important testimony at the hearings on the failure of the job market to absorb well-educated workers, offered the following statistics: only seven of every hundred new jobs are related to high technology occupations and most of these are low-skilled; five times more jobs are being created for fast-food workers than for computer technicians; there will be a need for two times as many janitors as computer system analysts.

In other words, the job market is polarizing U.S. workers, and the lower pole appears to be the fastest growing one. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' recent projections uniformly support the assertion that the economic future for millions of Americans will be in low-wage, low-skilled service and clerical positions. Far from a high technology future demanding skilled labor, the new technologies will be used to **reduce** the skill requirements of most jobs.[10]

A study of financial services and high technology firms in the Boston area indicates that jobs have not been upgraded by the application of sophisticated new technologies. For example, the head of employee training for Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Massachusetts is quoted as saying: "Those senior clerical jobs are disappearing. . . We have a lot more routine jobs at the bottom and a few more complex jobs at the top."[11] Many other industries appear to be following the same trend.

For too many young people, high technology will mean pushing the button with the picture of a cheeseburger at the counter of a fast food restaurant or key punching forms in an insurance company. As one of the hearing witnesses pointed out, "the logic of gearing schooling to the shape of the economy as it exists now and can be projected into the future will be to depress the level of education for most students, while preparing a small elite for the fraction of high-level scientific and executive jobs that will exist." This is not the sort of "golden future" which reports like "A Nation at Risk" portray, but it is much closer to our future realities.

These realities have profound implications for the schools. Our witnesses and many economists have argued that the job market will be divided between a few high-level professional jobs and a large number of low-level service jobs.

What will happen if the curriculum of high schools is revised, as many are proposing, so that students are expected to engage in a much more rigorous effort, focusing on basic skills, math, science, and technology, and consuming more hours and weeks of students' time? There are at least two possible outcomes.

It is possible that such a program would be implemented for all students. To accomplish this end, the allocation of resources would be vastly beyond the largest budget estimates now before the legislature, and the chance for appropriation of such funding is difficult to imagine in light of recent cutbacks. Even if funds were found, the result, ironically, would be a large pool of unemployed or underemployed graduates, frustrated at their inability to use their hard-earned skills and depressing the wage level for the best jobs because of the extent of the potential applicant pool.

A much more likely scenario is that the call for a new curriculum will be implemented, but only in a few schools, specifically suited to a privileged minority of the student generation. Some of the same school committees in Massachusetts which have recently adopted higher standards for their curriculum are also considering proposals which would reinforce the elitism of a few magnet high schools within their system. It is interesting to note, in this light, that the issue of **Newsweek** which covered the major educational reports also included a special report on a new North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics as one example of the kind of education called for (May 9, 1983).

This NCSSM is a statewide magnet school serving a small number of gifted high school students who are receiving the highest quality education needed for projected new leadership roles in industry. It provides this experience for only a tiny fraction of North Carolina's students.

Similarly, it is not hard to envision that in an economy increasingly fragmented into high- and low-level jobs, the same sort of two-tier structure would be applied more generally to public schools. There would be a few specialized school programs devoted to the quality education of an elite, while the majority of students were offered only minimal types of job training.

In a shrinking job market, the natural tendency is to think in terms of individual and collective survival, and to try to equip students with the skills that will get them jobs. Many would agree with the Cabinet Secretary who told the Legislature's education committee: "As we move into a knowledge-based economy at an increasingly rapid rate, we must be sure that our students are provided with an education that allows them to maintain this competitive edge." The question which arises is who will be competing with whom—and with what results. While the Secretary's testimony calls for competition with other regions of the United States as well as with other countries, much of the competition for quality jobs will be within Massachusetts.

There are no voices calling for such a two-tier educational system in Massachusetts, but there are many demanding that schooling be tied very closely to the needs of a polarizing job market. As one of the hearing witnesses pointed out, if you link education too closely to this sort of economy the result is "a school setting which is sharply stratified and fiercely competitive, with widely varying results." The result of such recommendations, he continued, is "to attack students' sense of their ability and self-worth, so that if they do not get a job in a failing economy, they will say 'I have only myself to blame.'" For a state which has led the nation in legislating the inclusion of all students to adopt such divisive and exclusion educational approaches would be tragic.

Another road must be found. We must turn to the problem of discovering what types of school reforms make sense. We must strive to continue this state's commitment to including all children in the potentials and rewards of education, which will give them the best chance of living up to their abilities.

While some, in the name of reform, are urging a much closer tie between education and the current job market, calling for a "matching of education and training resources to industry needs,"[12] many other Americans—and all of the witnesses at our hearings—insist on a much broader view of education. Schooling, they assert, should provide much more than simply job training.

John Goodlad's survey of parental, student, and teacher expectations of schooling revealed that the vast majority of those closest to the schools continue to want schools to address four broad goals:

1 academic: instruction in basic skills, and development of critical thinking and problem solving abilities
2 vocational: instruction preparing students for the expectations of the workplace and developing skills necessary for getting a job
3 social and civic: instruction which helps students get along with other students and adults, develop awareness and appreciation of their own and other cultures, and prepares students for social and civic effectiveness
4 personal: instruction which builds self-confidence, creativity, the ability to think independently, and self-discipline

When asked to select one primary goal, about half of the parents and teachers chose the academic area, with the rest distributing their choices among the other three goals. Students distributed their primary goals more evenly across all four categories. As Goodlad concluded, a substantial number of parents, teachers and students would be unhappy to have any of the goals eliminated.[13]

As these findings indicate, many parents, teachers and students are not supportive of the tendency in the current education debate to focus narrowly on the role of schooling in economic advancement. People closest to schools know that education must make sense to students at the time they are engaged in it, not merely be linked to some future pay-off.

John Dewey noted this reality almost a century ago, writing "I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living."[14] The educational experience in the Commonwealth's schools must be meaningful in its own right. It must include exposure to a broader culture, the development of self-respect and respect for others, and the development of democratic and humane values. To offer less is bound to rob youth of their present and to risk their disengagement from any schooling which might usefully prepare them for the future.

The witnesses at the Massachusetts Advocacy Center hearings provided some important starting points for considering an expanded definition of the proper curriculum for schools. While all rejected a simple "back to basics" approach, the testimony of several witnesses, when combined, provided an important new and broadened understanding of what should be included in basic education. This testimony, reported on page 10, stressed that education should provide students with:

- the skills to work for their own personal and communities' development;
- the psychological and physiological wholeness to be confident citizens;
- the skills to relate well with others and to work for effective social change; and
- the cultural skills to function as creative citizens in a diverse society.

These are not skills which will be fostered by matching education to the needs of industry. They are, however, essential if schools are to move, as one witness insisted, towards "a strategy for genuine reform of the public schools [which] must be based on a set of goals for public education consistent with the values of democracy and the needs of students and the society."

Others are calling for moves in these same directions. Theodore Sizer has recently written:

"Higher-order thinking skills—reasoning, imagining, analyzing, synthesizing—are the core of senior high school work, and they are learned through confrontation, through dialogue. One isn't told how to think; one reasons and has that reasoning critiqued."[15]

Being told how to think has never led to creative thinking. For that to happen, basic skills must be defined quite differently, as our witnesses have done. Another educator, Herbert Kohl, in his book, **Basic Skills**, proposes six new basic skills which are quite consistent with the list from the hearings. In Kohl's view, basic skills include the ability to:

- use language well and thoughtfully;
- think through problems and experiment with solutions;
- understand scientific and technical ideas and use tools;
- use the imagination to participate in and appreciate personal and group expression;
- understand how people function in groups; and
- learn how to learn throughout life and to contribute to the nurturance of others.[16]

There are other lists and any such list could be expanded easily. What is clear is that there are two very different views of the proper role of the schools —and the important basic skills which must be included in the curriculum— which are competing for attention in the current debate over educational reform. The winning side will dictate the role of humane values and democracy itself in the future of American education and society.

To insist that the needs of industry must not set the priority for the schools is not to argue that there is not a very important link between what happens in the state and nation's economy and what happens in the classroom. The links operate on several critical and complex levels. The most basic level— whether or not there are jobs available for future graduates—has an immediate impact on much of what goes on in the schools in varying ways. A 1977 study by the Carnegie Council for Children noted that "Most Americans work for their living and prefer it that way."[17]

This will likely be true in the future as well, but unemployment figures for recent school graduates and for drop-outs—in spite of the current "recovery"—are staggering.

This reality casts a depressing pall over too many adolescents. Without significant institutional change, many high school students will fail to see any reason for continuing in school when the prospects of unemployment loom so large, with or without a diploma.

The depressing impact of unemployment on citizens of any age has been well documented. The effect on young people, who are still developing a clear sense of personal identity, can be especially devastating. If those making federal policy seriously want to make an impact on the quality of education, one of the first steps would be to support a guarantee of full employment through a mix of public service jobs in housing, health and community service.

With such a guarantee, schooling would make much more sense to many potential drop-outs who sense a bleak future. A reconnection of schooling to the real job market would encourage student motivation.

Ultimately any attempt to discuss these issues must conclude with a vision of the kind of society in which meaningful education can take place. Fifty years ago, at the height of the great Depression, a group of distinguished educators met to examine their role in the problems facing the nation and its schools and to begin to work towards such a vision. They concluded:

"Because of the conditions which have been indicated, our professed and professional educational aims are fated to impotency with respect to both social advance and the systematic development of personal character unless the power inherent in science and technology is utilized for ends which are not controlled by economic institutions where competition for pecuniary gain is supreme."[6]

At another time of profound economic change and dislocation, when the potential for benefit and harm within science and technology is even greater than it was in the 1930s, educators can do no less. As a first step in tailoring educational reform to the larger goals—clearly articulated in the testimony from our hearings—we have developed a list of principles for educational reform which reflect both what we want for our school and, ultimately, what we want for our society.

III Starting points for school reform in Massachusetts

III Starting points for school reform in Massachusetts

Massachusetts currently has the opportunity to create its own blueprint for educational reform. It does not have to follow the emerging national pattern. As in the Commonwealth's response to federal welfare policies, the tendency of policy makers thus far has been towards modifying and mitigating the harsh effects of the Reagan agenda. In their proposals and statements, policymakers have avoided the "get tough" rhetoric of the national debate and have avoided calling for the "quick fixes" which are being instituted elsewhere.

But we are worried. The pressure is mounting to do something quickly about the condition of the schools. Throughout the United States, individual states and school districts are reorganizing and reforming their practices. Congress is holding hearings on national legislation, and the presidential candidates are debating their appropriate role.

In Massachusetts, city and town school committees are considering changes in many different aspects of school life. And the state legislature's Joint Committee on Education, in cooperation with the Governor, has been holding hearings preparatory to legislation which would significantly change the financing and control of education in this Commonwealth.

Currently reforms are being proposed without the most fundamental questions being asked: Will this change move us closer to developing effective skills for all students? Will this change move us closer to schools that function with the expectation that all students can learn, however different the path? Will this reform reinforce respect for cultural diversity? Is this reform directed at active citizenship and self-development, as well as economic survival? How does this reform relate to the changing and shrinking job market? Without answers to questions like these, proposed reforms which may initially sound right can quickly lead off in some dangerously wrong directions.

Massachusetts, like so many other states, could end up with a reform package that calls for sweeping changes yet is vastly underfunded, that pays lip service to equity but ignores the issues that are central to that important principle.

Before the Commonwealth of Massachusetts goes any further in its plans for educational reform, it is important to formulate basic guidelines for school reform, against which every proposal should be measured. The Massachusetts Advocacy Center, based on both the findings from the hearings reported here and our fourteen years of experience working with students, parents, and concerned educators proposes the following basic principles to serve as a yardstick for evaluating school reform in Massachusetts.

A Statement of principles: moving towards excellence for all

1 The dual goals of equality and quality are not separable or contradictory. Educational excellence involves a definition of quality that includes an unwavering commitment to quality **for all**.

2 The commitment to the education of disadvantaged students must be reaffirmed and expanded; access gains of the past 20 years must be maintained. Programs which have been designed to meet the needs of disadvantaged, special education and bilingual students should be used as models for improving the quality of education for all.

3 Education must prepare students for active, democratic citizenship, and as part of that process, schools themselves must be places which encourage and live by democratic values. The curriculum, the teaching methods, and the organizational structure of schools must reflect these values.

4 Schools must be appealing places in which to study and teach. As learning environments, they must embody a democratic commitment to the inclusion of all, a respect and appreciation for every student's culture, and a respect for the full constitutional rights of students and teachers.

5 The curriculum of the schools must deal with the needs of the whole person, not simply the more narrowly defined "basics". Focusing too much attention on the vocational goals of schooling undermines the broader and equally important goals of developing children's intellectual capacities, personal strengths, and their sense of social and civic responsibility.

6 Parents, teachers, students, and advocates can and should work together to achieve the goals of quality education for every child. In particular, parent participation must be welcomed at the school level and all these key actors should be actively included in outside partnerships.

9 There must be a rejection of the idea of a fixed limit on the resources available for children's education. The quality of education available to a student should not be a function of the wealth of the community where the student resides. Any discussion of financing for public education must begin with an examination of the unmet needs of all our children and then consider the most equitable plans for revenue generation and allocation.

7 High expectations and standards must be accompanied by clear commitments of support for students and staff. There must be a full dedication to the development of every child's potential for learning and a willingness to restructure or reorganize schools so that all children can learn.

8 The vision of what schools can be should **not** be derived from today's marketplace. Educational reforms must focus on developing those skills in future citizens which will lead them not to accept the job market as it is and simply try to fit in, but to find new and currently undreamed of ways of organizing this society for the benefit of all of its citizens.

10 Successful school reform demands an increased level of human services support to the families from which students come, and ultimately the implementation of a national full employment policy, and adequate income support policies for all families.

B Applications of principles: examining some current proposals for school reform in Massachusetts

It is not easy to translate principles into policies and programs. But this is, in fact, the task that is before us. As our first step, we have utilized the testimonies and principles suggested by our hearings to evaluate the report of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Education, issued in December, 1983. The report presents the proposals of the education committee, chaired by Senator Gerard D'Amico and Representative James Collins, concluding with comments from Governor Dukakis. It represents the most current effort to present a comprehensive educational reform package for Massachusetts.

Application of our "yardstick" to the report of the Joint Committee reveals several major problems. The report does not offer a compelling reason to care about education or educational reform. Reasonable, broad goals are set out: "to prepare each child to not merely survive, but excel, in our emerging knowledge-based economy and learning society;" and "to develop each child's intellect, talents, values, and sense of personal worth and public duty." And then specific proposals are made.

What is missing is what John Goodlad has called "the education gap"—any analysis of the distance between the broad goals and present levels of functioning.[1] There is no articulation of this gap, no clear definition of the educational needs, and consequently no logical connection between these concerns and the proposed solutions.

The testimony offered by witnesses at the Massachusetts Advocacy Center hearings provided dramatic evidence of this "education gap." Concerns and problems like those expressed by the witnesses must be taken seriously and addressed directly if the Committee hopes to motivate large numbers of people to participate in reform efforts. The current proposals before the Legislature come dangerously close to the national pattern: they include introductory statements that uphold such democratic values as equal educational opportunity, but fail to generate any significant proposals which address the reality of very unequal school and social conditions.

In particular, the initial proposals are frighteningly silent on fundamental issues of educational access and equity. As our witnesses testified, in the last two decades Massachusetts has made progress in the inclusion of all students in its schools. But much more progress is needed. Quality and equality are not separable; the commitment to the education of disadvantaged students must be fulfilled (Principles 1 and 2).

In the current proposals there is no clear affirmation of the importance of compensatory education, bilingual education or special education. Nor do the proposals deal adequately with many issues that are central to equity such as remediation, alternative learning environments, class size, cultural diversity, and school governance.

The comprehensive curriculum and school plan

The section of the report on finance begins to address the distribution of resources, and specifically to move the state toward a more equitable distribution (Principle 9), but even here the committee has not specifically addressed the issue of increasing bilingual costs resulting from a growing bilingual population, or how even the current commitments to special education will be met.

Without a clear statement of the problems and needs, or principles and values, the proposals themselves seem scattershot and confusing in priority. The report does not present a comprehensive plan or defined process for school improvement. Proposals are grouped into nine major areas, with no explanation as to why these particular areas were selected, or as to how they might fit together into a unified framework or a long-term agenda.

The statements that begin each of the areas include a brief account of perceived, but not carefully diagnosed problems. At times these statements reflect an understanding of the types of concerns raised by our witnesses, but even then, the actual proposals fall short of addressing these.

On the following pages, most of the report's major areas are briefly examined to illustrate some of the more serious shortcomings.

This section proposes a "planning process beginning at each school and involving parents, teachers, administrators and other community people," with the hoped for result of "increased concern and support for our public schools and in direct achievement of what each community wants for its schools."

This appears to speak to our concern for greater parent participation (Principle 6), yet the proposals call primarily for more paperwork, and fail to offer any compelling reason why parents, teachers, or community people should participate, or what their roles might be. The actual process of school governance is left untouched.

Assessment/ Testing

This section proposes a state assessment program in order to know "how well Massachusetts schools are doing" for parents to know "if their child's school system is striving to do its best," and for teachers and administrators to know "what their system's weaknesses are and strengths and improvements are."

Such an assessment program would be very valuable in evaluating whether schools are reflecting democratic values (Principle 3), creating a positive multi-cultural learning environment (Principle 4), defining "the basics" broadly (Principle 5), and successfully raising expectations as well as standards (Principle 9). But just 1½ pages are devoted to the actual means of accomplishing this difficult task.

The proposed assessment comes down to a test on the "effectiveness of instruction" in major curricular areas and a statewide basic skills test. These tests alone will not provide a full picture of how well Massachusetts schools are doing or where improvements are needed. A complete assessment of the schools must include other measures of educational achievement (e.g., the overall student retention rate in the schools) as well as other measures of school success (e.g., how well the schools are doing at creating a positive, democratic multi-cultural school climate).

Professional Development

This section begins with the commitment "not to scapegoat teachers" but "rather to find significant ways to support and strengthen conditions for career educators." After a lengthy discussion of just how bad these conditions are, the major recommendations call for 10% more time in school with a 10% salary increase; the abolishment of tenure and its replacement with a new system—with less due process—entitled FAIR employment rights; a proposal for differentiated instructional roles and for more extensive evaluation of teachers.

It is hard to see how these proposals will significantly change the conditions that are undermining teaching and learning. It is also hard to see how this will provide teachers with the needed encouragement and support to do their jobs well (Principle 7) or give teachers more of a role in school improvement (Principle 6).

Computer technology

Lucretia Crocker Foundation

This lengthy and more thoughtful section of the report stresses the importance of planning and teacher training in the introduction of new technologies into the schools, discusses the lack of good instructional software, and then proposes $11 million for the purchase of hardware and software. The talk is restrained, but the financing is not. With so many dollars and resources going into computers, there is a danger that the schools will be drawn more narrowly into job training for high technolgy, despite the growing realization that this is a dead-end for many students (Principle 8).

The new public foundation for innovation has been designed for "promotion, evaluation, and replication of innovative programs and methods." Certainly additional funds are needed if the schools commit themselves to developing the policies, practices and basic structural arrangements that are necessary to meeting the needs of all students. (Principle 7) Yet, this very brief section contains no clear statement of the Legislative Committee's own fundamental commitments and goals in educational reform, and thus lacks any real content. The toal amount of money to be set aside for innovation is $3 million, less than one-third of the proposed outlay for computers.

The Legislature's report should, of course, be evaluated for what it doesn't say, as well as what it does say. We agree with Theodore Sizer that the report "stands out for its restraint," and that "it takes courage to be modest when the subject is schooling."[1] Schools are complex institutions. No one set of proposals can or should carry the whole burden of school improvement. But what is enacted this year will set the direction for years to come. We need to be asking the right questions, to be analyzing the real problems, and formulating proposals that adhere to principles that will bring us closer to a democratic education system. It is our hope, and our belief that the concerns expressed by parents, educators, students, and concerned citizens at the MAC hearings — and the principles for school reform that derive from these — can serve as a starting point.

Footnotes

Section II

1 Kenneth Keniston and the Carnegie Council on Children, **All Our Children: The American Family Under Pressure** (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 84.

2 See Deborah Meier, "'Getting Tough' in the Schools: A Critique of the Conservative Prescription," **Dissent** (Winter, 1984), pp. 61-70.

3 William Brown, cited in The Boston **Globe**, Wednesday, February 8, 1984, p. 19.

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8 Erik Butler and Jon Darr, **Lessons from Experience: An Interim Review of the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act**, The Vice President's Task Force on Youth Employment (Waltham, MA: Center for Public Service, Brandeis University, 1980).

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Section III

1 John I. Goodlad, **A Place Called School** (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983).

2 Theodore Sizer, "Passive Restraint: The Legislature's Report on Education Is Noteworthy for What It Doesn't Say," **The Boston Observer** (February, 1984), pp. 13-15.

Appendix

Citizens' panel for the hearings October 19 and 20 1983

Hubert E. Jones (Chair)
Dean, Boston University School of Social Work and Board of Inquiry Member, National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS)

Ms. Sheila R. Decter
Executive Director, New England Region American Jewish Congress

Ms. Mary Ann Hardenbergh
Citizens for Public Schools (Boston) and former member, Massachusetts State Board of Education

Dr. Ambrose Jearld
Cape Cod Branch, NAACP

Dr. James Jennings
Dean, College of Public and Community Service, University of Massachusetts/ Boston

Dr. Sonia Nieto
Assistant Professor, School of Education, University of Massachusetts/ Amherst

Ms. Miriam Thompson
Executive Director
Advocates for Children of New York

Witnesses at the hearings

Charles P. Andrade, Esq.
Chair, Legal Redress Committee, Cape Cod Branch, NAACP and Professor of Law and Political Science Cape Cod Community College

Dr. Diane Balser
Convenor, Massachusetts Unity Alliance

Mr. Timothy Barrett
Assistant Superintendent, Holyoke Public Schools

Dr. Bradford E. Brown
Chair, Massachusetts Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

Ms. Ana Castro
Community Organizer and Parent of Children in the Lowell Public Schools

Ms. Aida Colon
President, PUEDO (Parents United in Education and Development of Others) and Parent of Children in the Boston Public Schools

Mr. Don Davies
President, Institute for Responsive Education

Ms. Isabel Delgado
Student, Boston Latin School

Ms. Carol Doherty
President, Massachusetts Teachers Association

Ms. Kecha Evans
Parent of Children in the Boston Public Schools

Ray Flynn
Boston Mayoral Candidate

Ms. Sara Freedman
Project Director, National Institute of Education Research Grant on Teacher Working Conditions

Dr. Luis Fuentes
Director, Bilingual Multicultural Program
University of Massachusetts/Amherst

Ms. Kathy Greely
National Education Coordinator
Jobs with Peace

Ms. Dorothy S. Jones
Director, Office of Desegregation, Cambridge Public Schools and Chair, National Committee for School Desegregation

Mel King
Boston Mayoral Candidate

Dr. Peter M. Mitchell
Vice Chancellor, Massachusetts Board of Regents for Higher Education

Ms. Betsy A. Nelson
Director, School Volunteers for Boston, Inc.

Ms. Carmen Pola, Former Director, Project to Monitor the Code of Discipline

Dr. Steven Rauderbush
Instructor and Researcher
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Dr. Richard R. Rowe
President and Chief Executive Officer
The Faxon Company

Ms. Barbara Schnuer
Education Specialist, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts

Dr. David Stratman
Educational Consultant and Parent of Children in the Boston Public Schools

Dr. Diane Tabor
Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction, Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School

Ms. Dawn Thomas
Former Director, Indian Education Commission, Mashpee

Mr. Paul Vasington
Student, Norwood High School

Mr. Meyer Weinberg
Director, Horace Mann Bond Center for Equal Education
University of Massachusetts/Amherst

Mr. Emmanuel Yap
Student, Boston Latin School

Mrs. Martha Ziegler
Executive Director, Federation for Children with Special Needs

Sources

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National Commission on Excellence in Education, United States Department of Education, chaired by David P. Gardner, "A Nation at Risk"

Education Commission of the States, Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, chaired by James B. Hunt, Jr., "Action for Excellence"

The College Entrance Examination Board, Educational Equality Project, George H. Hanford, chair, "Academic Preparation for College"

Twentieth Century Fund, Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, Robert Wood, chair, "Making the Grade"

The Carnegie Corporation of New York, James B. Hunt, Jr. and David Hamburg, chairs, "Education and Economic Progress: Toward a National Education Policy"

The National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Commission on Educational Issues of the National Association of Independent Schools, Theodore R. Sizer, chair, "A Celebration of Teaching: High Schools in the 1980s"

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Ernest L. Boyer, chair, "High School: A Report on American Secondary Education"

John I. Goodlad, **A Place Called School** (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983)

Diane Ravitch, **The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980** (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

NCAS

National Coalition of Advocates for Students

Member Organizations

Advocates for Children of New York, New York, NY

Center for Law and Education, Cambridge, MA & Washington, D.C.

Chicano Education Project, Denver, CO & Center, CO

Children's Defense Fund, Washington, D.C. & Jackson, MS

Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools, Cleveland, OH & Columbus, OH

Designs for Change, Chicago, IL

Massachusetts Advocacy Center, Boston, MA

National Black Child Development Institute, Washington, D.C.

Parents Union for Public Schools, Philadelphia, PA

Southeastern Public Education Program, Columbia, SC & Macon, GA

Statewide Youth Advocacy, Rochester, NY

STEPS, Athens, GA

Student Advocacy Center, Ann Arbor, MI

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